**41% of kids have bowel trouble**

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* From: *National Features*
* May 05, 2012 7:00PM



A lack of fibre in the diet is being blamed. Picture: Getty *Source:* National Features

**RECENT studies show our childrens lack of dietary fibre is laying the groundwork for problems later in life.**

Kids should be producing healthy sausages on a near-daily basis, says a bowel health expert – and, yes, he’s talking about poo. But he’s concerned that an increasing number are passing motions that look more like pebbles or, worse still, not producing much at all.  
  
"That means there are a lot of uncomfortable kids out there," says Professor Terry Bolin, gastroenterologist and president of the Gut Foundation. He says he is not surprised that a growing number of children are reporting bowel problems, mostly constipation, considering the diets many of us now have.  
  
"Not many of us are getting enough fibre in our diet, and that means kids as well," he says. "What’s also worrying is that many parents don’t know how much fibre their kids need and where they can get it."

\*\* All plugged up  
  
A study commissioned by the Gut Foundation last year found that 41 per cent of primary school-age children in Australia experience regular bowel problems such as pain and constipation, most likely linked to a lack of fibre in their diet.   
  
Also concerning, Bolin says, is that about half of the mums surveyed didn’t know how much fibre their kids needed or where to get it.

"That’s a staggering number of kids having bowel problems – too many,” he says. "Children are unable to get their fibre requirements unless they eat wholegrain cereals, legumes and fruit and vegetables."  
  
And those daily fibre requirements are substantial. Kids need between 15 and 24 grams of fibre a day (or their age plus between five and 10 grams). If two Weet-Bix have three grams and half a cup of carrot has two grams, it shows how much high-fibre food kids need to eat daily to reach their quota.  
  
\*\* What kids are eating  
  
While studies over recent years have shown that kids are eating more than ever, a startling shortage of fresh fruit and veg has been highlighted.   
  
The 2007 Australian National Children’s Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey found that between the ages of four and eight, just 60 per cent ate adequate amounts of fruit and only 22 per cent ate enough vegetables. And that was the good news, because by the age of 16, only one per cent met the guidelines for fruit and five per cent ate enough vegetables.  
  
Some of the best sources of fibre are wholegrain cereals and legumes, such as lentils and beans. But Bolin believes children aren’t getting anywhere near enough of these or are refusing to eat them.

"Make sure your kids eat a high-fibre breakfast cereal every day so they can get a good start."  
  
\*\* Long-term problems  
  
US research has shown that children with chronic constipation have a worse quality of life than those with more serious medical conditions, while a European study found that a quarter of kids with constipation will continue to suffer in adulthood.  
  
Constipation can also develop insidiously over time, beginning when a child holds back bowel movements for whatever reasons. When a child ignores the message to poo, it can disrupt the brain-signalling mechanism that tells a child when stools need to come out.   
  
Stool build-up makes bowel movements painful. Nutritionist Sonya Stanley, Dietitians Association of Australia spokeswoman, says this can make the child even more anxious: "A bad experience with constipation can make children reluctant to use their bowels, making the problem worse."  
  
Stanley says toilet training and the start of a new school year are high-risk periods that can trigger constipation.  
  
She says water and a high-fibre diet can prevent major episodes of constipation.  
  
\*\* Packing a fibre punch  
  
+ Baked beans (1/2 cup) = 7g  
  
+ Green peas (1/2 cup) = 5g  
  
+ Pear (average size) = 4g  
  
+ Raspberries (1 cup) = 8g  
  
+ Wholemeal pasta (1/2 cup) = 4g  
  
+ White pasta (1/2 cup) = less than 1g  
  
+ Wholemeal/rye bread (one slice) = 2g  
  
+ White bread (one slice) = less than 1g